

HOW TO COLOR COMICS

THE MARVEL® WAY



Originally appearing in
MARVEL AGE #13
April 1984

Jim Shooter
 Editor-in-Chief

Jim Salicrup
 Editor and Design Director

Mark Lerer
 Editorial Assistant

Bob Kessel
 Designer

Brenda Mings
Jay Zilber
 Typesetter

Paul Becton
George Roussos
 Colorists

Jim Starlin
 Cover Artist

Carol Kalish
 Direct Sales Manager

Peter David
 Assistant Direct Sales Manager

Irvyng Forbush
 Cosmic Defender

MARVEL AGE™ Vol. 1, No. 13, April, 1984. Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Published monthly. Copyright © 1984 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 25¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate \$4.00 for 12 issues. Canada and Foreign, \$6.00. Printed in the U.S.A. MARVEL AGE (including all prominent characters featured in the issues), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of and have been copyrighted by, the MARVEL COMICS GROUP.

HOW TO COLOR COMICS

THE MARVEL[®] WAY

by Mark Lerer

Color commands attention and brings power and beauty to comic books, and the craft of coloring is highly rewarding. Marvel receives scores of coloring submissions every month from talented people who want to go professional but aren't familiar with the basics of the business. So, while you won't become a professional colorist just by reading this article, we thought a little discussion of the colorist's trade would be a good idea. Indeed, no matter what part of the comics field you're interested in, you'll benefit from knowing the principles of good coloring. **Marie Severin**, who has mastered nearly every aspect of the medium, strongly recommends that every writer, penciler, or inker color at least once. Furthermore, the recent technical breakthroughs of printing on high-quality paper and printing in full-process color make the colorist's job more exciting, and more important, than ever.

Unfortunately, there's no one place you can go to learn how to be a comic book colorist. The demands of the craft are unique, so the only real way to learn coloring is to do it. Almost all of our colorists are experienced artists in more than one medium. Many have penciling and inking experience behind them. Some, like **Christie Scheele**, **Daina Graziunas**, and **George Roussos**, are painters. Studying drawing and painting is an excellent way to learn the principles of lighting, of com-

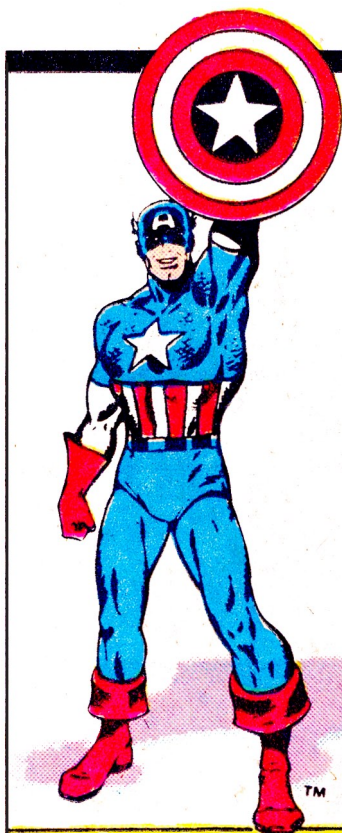


position, and the nature of color. Before you can become a colorist, we recommend you develop a good color sense and have thorough knowledge of the interaction of color and light on figures and shapes. Know how to mix different shades from the primary colors, and how to combine and contrast hues in pleasing and eye-catching ways.

Tools, Materials, and the Color Chart. Comic books are printed in the sixty-four combinations of red, blue, yellow, and their lighter shades shown here on the printer's color chart. The notation may be a little confusing. **R** means a solid, or "100% screen," of red. Likewise, **B** means a 100% screen of blue, and **Y** means a 100% screen of yellow. "**Y2**" means a 25% screen of yellow, which makes up very light yellow shade, and "**Y3**" means a 50% screen of yellow, which makes

up the intermediate yellow shade. Similarly for **R2**, **R3**, **B2**, and **B3**. Every color on the chart is a combination of these shades. For example, solid green is **YB**, a 100% yellow combined with a 100% blue. **R3B2**, a reddish purple, is a 50% red screen combined with a 25% blue screen. The colorist mixes these colors from water-soluble dyes, and paints them on a xerox of the black-and-white inked comic book art, to make a guide for the separator at the printing plant who actually prints the comics in color.

Professional colorists use Dr. Martin's brand Synchronic Watercolor Dyes, which come in a set of thirty-six colors, and a size #2 or #3 sable watercolor brush. Now, Dr. Martin's Dyes don't come labeled with the printer's notation, and learning how to mix the sixty-four printer's colors from the dyes takes some practice. The basic colors come straight out of the bottle: the dye called "Lake" gives you **R**, "Cerulean Blue" gives you **B**, "Lemon Yellow" gives you **Y**, and "Emerald" gives you **YB**. To mix the 25% and 50% shades, simply thin the colors with water. For example, you get **Y3** by mixing equal parts of Lemon Yellow dye and water, and you get **Y2** by mixing one part Lemon Yellow dye with three parts water. These are not perfectly exact recipes, either — you'll have to play with the dyes and get a feel for how much water to mix with how much dye to make the shades shown on the color chart.



© 1983 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved.

Let's try coloring a few characters. **Captain America's** costume is pretty easy. His colors are **YR**, **B**, and white. **YR** comes straight out of the bottle labelled "Vermillion," and **B** you already know comes straight out of the bottle of Cerulean Blue. White, of course, you just leave blank! **The Hulk** is a little harder. His skin is **YB2** and his pants are **RB2**. **RB2** comes straight out of the bottle labelled "Magenta." The best way to get **YB2** is to mix "Nile Green" with a little bit of Lemon Yellow.

Sometimes the color are really tough to mix from the dyes, in which case you use a shortcut. Take, for example, **Doctor Doom**. His hood and cape are **YBR2**. If you try to mix this color exactly, you'll go crazy! So the colorist mixes green with a little brown for a close approximation, and labels the color "**YBR2**" right on the Xerox in pen. **Doom's** armor is even worse — to approximate the gray color of metal, we use a dark purple called **Y2R2B3**, with white highlights. Same thing — mix up a close enough gray, and write "**Y2R2B3**" on it.

Here are a few more useful recipes. A good flesh tone is **Y2R2**, made by thinning down Lemon Yellow and mixing it with thinned

down Lake. Use "Light Brown" for **YR3B2**, which is both the hair color of most brown-haired characters and the color used for black characters' skin. For a good shocking pink, thin down "Rose Carthaine" with water until you get **R2** or **R3**. Characters who wear black often have blue highlights. For these blue highlights, you can either use plain old **B**, or what colorists call "Dracula Blue," **Y2BR2**. We'll leave it to you as an exercise to mix this one up on your own. Finally, a word of warning. Some of the colors on the chart tend not to print accurately or consistently. You may have trouble getting a wide range of grays and browns. Avoid **YRB**, **Y2BR**, and **Y2BR3**.


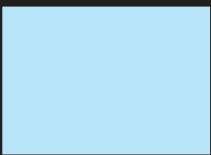
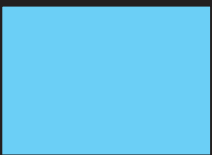
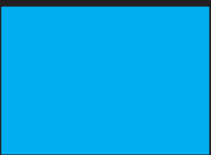












Telling the story. You'll want to know some rules before coloring your first comic book story. As Editor in Chief, **Jim Shooter** has laid down the fundamentals for coloring comics the Marvel Way. There is no single formula for how to color comic book stories — at least not any more! **Jim** told us that when he first entered the business, almost twenty years ago, there actually was a formula for coloring comics. Heroes were all colored in solid, 100% primary colors, villains were all in solid secondary colors, civilians were all dark blue and brown,

and backgrounds were always pastel 25% or 50% shades. Of course, this was a very restrictive formula, and allowed the colorist no artistic freedom or imagination. But it *did* establish some fundamentals which are necessary for you to adhere to. While creativity and imagination are essential, your coloring must first accomplish some basic ends.

The first basic goals are clarity and depth. The main characters in the panel have to stand out. To make the story clear and make it possible for the reader to follow the action, keep this in mind: in any picture, there are three planes in which the action takes place, the foreground, the middle ground, and the background. There should be contrast between the foreground figures and their surroundings. Make subtle variations of color only *within* the planes — if you color an object pale purple against a brown background, it just won't show up too well, and the picture will be unclear and muddy. In general, color the planes to contrast with one another. Keep the planes consistent and fairly simple. Do not break the backgrounds up too much with different colors. Many beginners will color every doorknob and every book in a bookcase a different color. This will only confuse the



© 1983 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved.

		NO BLUE	25 BLUE	50 BLUE	100 BLUE
NO YELLOW	NO RED				
		WHITE	B2	B3	B
	25 RED				
		R2	R2 B2	R2 B3	B R2
	50 RED				
		R3	R3 B2	R3 B3	B R3
	100 RED				
		R	R B2	R B3	B R

		NO BLUE	25 BLUE	50 BLUE	100 BLUE
25 YELLOW	NO RED				
		Y2	Y2 B2	Y2 B3	Y2 B
	25 RED				
		Y2 R2	Y2 R2 B2	Y2 R2 B3	Y2 B R2
	50 RED				
		Y2 R3	Y2 R3 B2	Y2 R3 B3	Y2 B R3
	100 RED				
		Y2 R	Y2 R B2	Y2 R B3	Y2 B R

Color Chart

50 YELLOW

	NO BLUE	25 BLUE	50 BLUE	100 BLUE
50 YELLOW	NO RED			
		Y3	Y3 B2	Y3 B3
	25 RED			
		Y3 R2	Y3 R2 B2	Y3 R2 B3
50 YELLOW	50 RED			
		Y3 R3	Y3 R3 B2	Y3 R3 B3
	100 RED			
		Y3 R	Y3 R B2	Y3 R B3

100 YELLOW

	NO BLUE	25 BLUE	50 BLUE	100 BLUE
100 YELLOW	NO RED			
		Y	Y B2	Y B3
	25 RED			
		Y R2	Y R2 B2	Y R2 B3
100 YELLOW	50 RED			
		Y R3	Y R3 B2	Y R3 B3
	100 RED			
		Y R	Y R B2	Y R B3

reader. Make only the *key* elements in the story stand out. Also, avoid putting all dark or all light colors in any one panel. If you have to color a scene that takes place at night, the backgrounds will have to be dark, so use your knowledge of composition and lighting to place lighter shades on the characters, to keep the contrast between foreground and background. That variation of lights and darks in each panel is important.

Beware! There are limitations of the printing process to watch out for. Too much modeling or blending on the figures will not print clearly. Also, if the picture has a group of many small characters, you probably won't be able to color them all differently. In that case, do a "knockout —" treat the grouping as a background and color them all one color. The best rule of thumb — *keep it simple*.

Tell the story. Pay attention to the script for color indications. Trees are a different color in autumn, things are darker when underwater or wet, and so on. If you follow the story and use common sense, you'll avoid making a lot of dumb mistakes!

Some standard devices. In general, you should color things the way they are in real life — apples are red, grass is green, and **the Thing** is orange. But a couple of stock-in-trade "tricks" can heighten the

drama and really add something to the story. A large knockout at a crucial moment, such as an explosion or a reaction shot of someone's terrified face, can make a scene that much more powerful. Equally effective is highlighting, where you either leave white, or color in a different shade, those parts of a figure close to the light source. Large highlights can make the light source seem twice as intense. For example, a civilian with white or yellow highlights standing next to **the Human Torch** makes **the Torch's** flame look particularly hot! Use knockouts and highlights *sparingly*. Don't use them out of laziness, and don't use them too often in one story, otherwise they'll lose their dramatic impact.

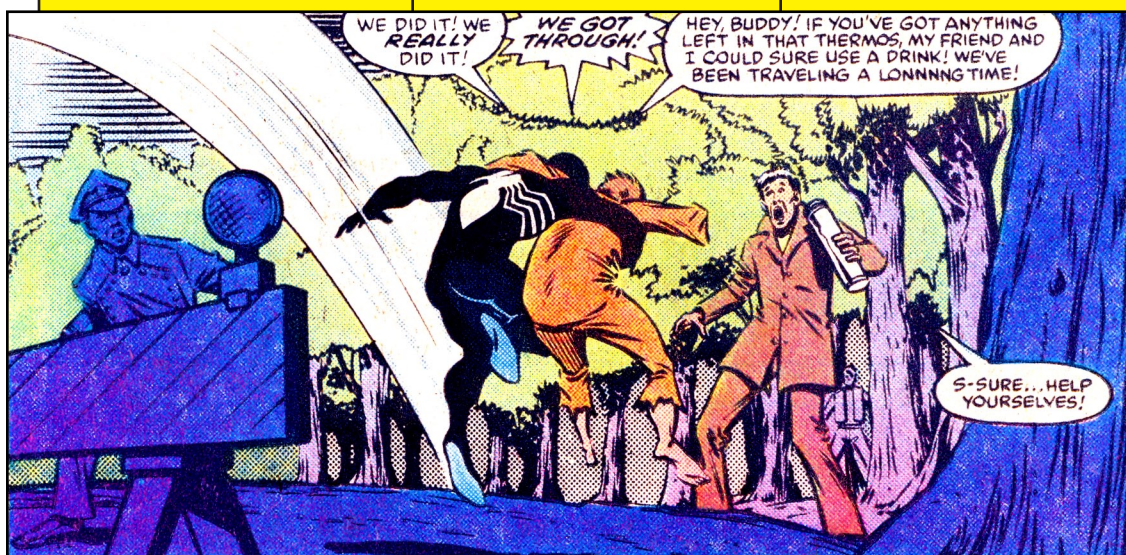
People always ask us how we manage sometimes to print a figure's *outline* in a color other than black. It's done by means of something called an overlay. The lines to be printed in color are inked in black on a clear acetate sheet, attached to the page of artwork. It's not really the colorist's prerogative to decide when to use an overlay. That's generally the decision of the penciller or inker. Often, though, the penciller and inker will consult with the colorist to decide what color the overlay should be printed in. An imaginative color choice can make the overly very effective.

Before going on to the next sec-

tion, take a look at a recent Marvel comic and notice the coloring. You should see the fundamentals in action. The main figures, and elements important to the story, stand out from their surroundings. Backgrounds are generally simple, large areas of just a few colors. Dramatic effects appear only when they add to the story. On a particularly exciting job, you should also see the colorist's imagination at work, with an unusual, artistic, and creative use of striking and different hues.

Coloring for high-quality paper. Baxter, Hudson, and Mando stocks are much whiter than regular paper. Colors look especially vibrant when printed on Baxter paper. The colorist must adjust his palette accordingly. Too many bright solid colors can overpower the reader and cause the story to lose clarity. So, for example, if you're coloring a story for Baxter paper that would ordinarily call for a lot of 100% yellow, you'll want to tone it down to a 50% yellow in many places. One wonderful thing about coloring for Baxter paper is that the screens used in the printing process are finer, so colors print more accurately. You can use many of the grays, browns, and pastels that don't print well on regular paper. You can color "graduated" background tones, too.

Because we've only begun to use the high quality papers, they are a



© 1983 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved.



FINAL VERSION

Coming up with the color scheme for a new character isn't always easy — check out the many color designs that Paul Becton and George

Roussos, working closely with editor Bob Budiansky, came up with, which were considered for Marvel's newest superstar, Red Wolf!

challenge for many colorists. We are still learning the idiosyncracies of the whiter papers, and many of the freedoms and limitations they present still are not known! **Glynis Wein**, who has worked extensively for Baxter paper, told us that it took her several issues of coloring just to get a feel for how those same sixty-four colors behave on high-quality stock.

Covers. Color covers using the same principles that you would follow for coloring the insides of a comic. Remember clarity, depth, and contrast. However, because the cover is the first, most critical picture in attracting the reader's attention, it must be as dramatic and startling as possible. Further, the color separation process used for covers, like that used for high-quality papers, allows a fuller range of colors, including grays, browns, and graduated background tones. Cover colorist **George Roussos** occasionally takes liberties such as coloring a blue character purple for the sake of mood or atmosphere. The title lettering or logo should be prominent, set off in good contrast from the background and the scene depicted. Center the interest, and *grab* the reader! The cover is the most important single picture in the comic — color it accordingly!

Full-Process Color. Entirely different from regular sixty-four color printing, full-process color is a fairly recent development in comics publishing. In full-process coloring, the colorist paints a finished piece which is photographically reproduced for the final comic book. This method is often called "coloring for reproduction," because the mark of the colorist's hand will be reproduced exactly in the comic. You've seen full-process color in **EPIC ILLUSTRATED**, the Marvel **Graphic Novels**, our **Special Edition** reprint books, and many covers for our regular line of comics.

When working full-process, a colorist colors not on a xerox, but on a full size photostat of the black and white artwork. Here you can more fully explore the range of colors that Dr. Martin's Dyes will give. **George Roussos** recommends mixing a drop of Photo-flo, a commercially available chemical, with the Dr. Martin's dyes to make them flow more

smoothly on the stat paper, for more even color. Modeling and blending are possible with full-process color. You can also work with paints other than Dr. Martin's dyes. **Bob Sharen**, for example, likes to use water-soluble fine-point magic markers. For the **NEW MUTANTS Graphic Novel**, **Glynis Wein** did a good deal of highlighting in white tempa paint. **Christie Scheele**, frustrated by the Dr. Martin's Dyes, used opaque acrylic and casein paints for the grays and purples in the second issue of the **DR. STRANGE Special Edition**.

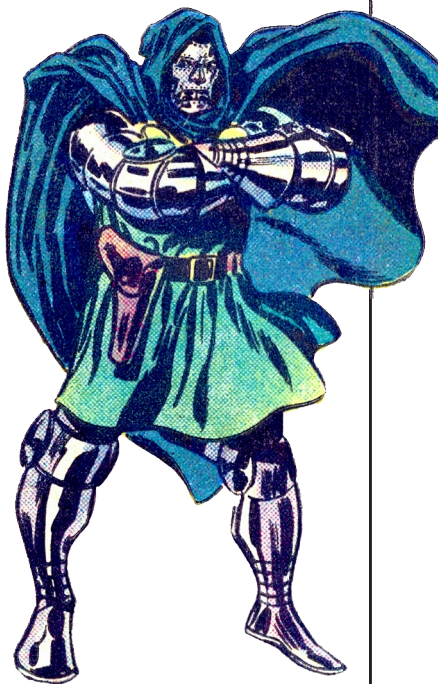
Some recent experiments with full-process color have worked particularly beautifully. **Christie Scheele** and **Daina Graziunas** colored "The Price" for the **DREADSTAR Annual** in acrylic and casein paints on a twice-sized stat of **Jim Starlin's** black and white halftone artwork. The result of this experiment, suggested by **Jim Shooter** himself, had the highly realistic and pleasing look of a tinted photograph. Posters for Marvel Press are done in Dr. Martin's Dyes on full-size, blue- or grayline reproductions printed on illustration board. The illustration board's highly absorbent surface allows extensive watercolor technique. Here full-process color reproduction frees the colorist to do highly meticulous, painterly work. Look at the **Spider-Man** poster, colored by **Christie**, and the **Cloak and Dagger** poster, done by **Glynis** for coloring as fully realized as penciling and inking.

Concluding remarks. Coloring for reproduction gives you far greater chromatic and technical freedom than regular process coloring, including the ability to model and blend. You must, however, adhere to the same fundamental principles of storytelling which you would follow for the regular coloring process.

Keep it simple. Don't try to show off! An editor can always tell a beginner's work when it's too "self-conscious," or when there's unnecessary trickery. Telling the story comes first. Clarity, depth, and contrast are more important than virtuosity for its own sake. Think of yourself as part of a team with the writer, penciler, and inker. Be as imaginative and creative as you can, but know the limitations of the

printing process.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes — it takes a lot of practice to get really good, so don't get discouraged if you mess up the first few times. Even after you've gotten a professional assignment, you'll be surprised at how many things there are to learn. be patient. The regular process is very limited, and full-process is a new and unknown animal, so your work may not always come out looking the way you had envisioned it.



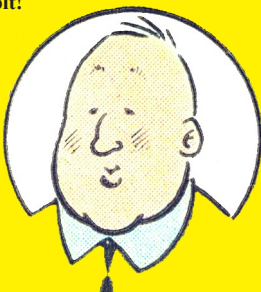
© 1983 Marvel Comics Group. All rights reserved.

If you do get a crack at a pro job, be dependable. The proficient and reliable colorist will have no problem getting work on a regular basis. Remember, too, though, that it takes years to build up the reputation of a **Marie Severin** or a **Glynis Wein**. Give it your best shot — because we're always open to new talent, you may find, with some hard work and determination, that you can become a Marvel comics colorist. Check out **THE OFFICIAL MARVEL COMICS TRY-OUT BOOK**, on sale now, for more information and full details on how to submit coloring samples.

Our staff. The men and women who color Marvel comics are the best in the business. Meet the terrific people who helped us put this article together:



Paul Becton is Marvel's Coloring Co-ordinator. He's responsible for changes, corrections, and keeping reference files for the proper coloring of our characters' costumes. **Paul's** coloring can be seen most recently in **U.S. 1 #3** and **DEFENDERS #126**. Born in 1952, **Paul** has lived all his life in Staten Island, New York. **Paul's** been reading comics since he was a kid, his early favorites, **the Fantastic Four**, **Spider-Man**, and **Kid Colt**. **Paul** has been drawing for just about as long, and has attended New York's High School of Art and Design and the School of Visual Arts. **Paul** discovered coloring along his way toward becoming a penciler. With Marvel since 1982, **Paul** enjoys coloring tremendously, and hopes Marvel will someday bring back **Kid Colt**!



George Roussos has been working in comics since the early 1940's, when he worked with **Bob Kane** on the original **Batman** strip. Under the pen-name **George Bell**, he has inked many of Marvel's top books, including the **FANTASTIC FOUR**. **George** credits illustrator **Stan Kaye** for much of his professional education. A talented and experienced artist, **George** has been a regular Marvel cover colorist for the past thirteen years. **George** enjoys experimentation and invention in his work, the results of which can be seen on many Marvel covers and in the work of the many professionals whose work he has influenced.



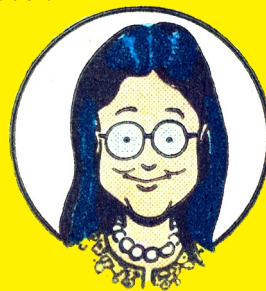
Christie Scheele was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, and raised in upstate New York. **Christie** came to New York City upon completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Alfred University. **Christie** began coloring for Marvel in 1980, when **Jim Shooter** noted that her try-out assignment, an **X-MEN** reprint story, was the best first-time coloring job he had seen. One of Marvel's top colorists in both regular and full-process methods, **Christie** divides her time between comics work, oil painting, and teaching Spanish part-time.



Marie Severin could easily be the subject of a whole book. After studying at New York's Cartoonists and Illustrators School, **Marie** became the head colorist for the legendary EC Comics line of the 1950's, where she colored such comics as **Tales From The Crypt** and **Mad**. "Adopted" by **Stan Lee** in 1956, **Marie** freelanced for Marvel until she came on staff in 1965. **Marie** has colored, penciled and inked every form of comic strip from **THE SUB-MARINER** to her wonderful cartooning for **NOT BRAND ECCH** and **CRAZY**. **Marie** has taught and influenced nearly everyone in the comics field with her skill, dedication, and wit.



Bob Sharen was born in Morristown, New Jersey in 1946. **Bob** started at Marvel in 1977 as a background inker. He soon found coloring more to his liking, and went on to color **SPIDER-MAN**, **DR. STRANGE**, and **THE HULK**. **Bob** is currently excited and fascinated by the possibilities of full-process color, and his work in that area can be seen in the **SUPER BOXERS Graphic Novel**, and the **MICRONAUTS Special Edition**.



Glynis Wein was born in England, and raised in England and Huntington, Long Island. With Marvel since 1972, **Glynis** has won many fan and professional awards for her distinctive and beautiful work. **Glynis** has colored all the Marvel mainstays, as well as many special projects during her celebrated career. **Glynis** enjoys watercolor painting in addition to her comics work.



Andy Yanchus was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1944, where he still lives. After attending Pratt Institute, **Andy** worked for Aurora Products, and helped develop the well-known Aurora models of monsters and comic book characters. **Andy** came to Marvel in the mid-seventies, where he served a term as head of Marvel's coloring department. **Andy** now colors fulltime for Marvel, where his work can regularly be seen in **DAZZLER**, **CRYSTAL**, **ALPHA FLIGHT**, and **MARVEL TALES**.